

Natalie W. Bell
 November 16, 2025
 Commitment Sunday

***Seeking the Kingdom
 Matthew 6:25-33***

*“Therefore I tell you, **do not worry** about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,^[k] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the **birds** of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?^[l] ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the **lilies** of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.*

*³⁰ But if God so clothes the **grass** of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ **Therefore do not worry**, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*

*³³ **But seek first the kingdom of God^[m] and his^[n] righteousness, and **all these things will be given to you as well.*****

***At Community Christian Church, outside of Chicago,
 they celebrate one Sunday a year as ‘The Big Give’.***

It’s one of the highest attended worship services all year long,
 as big, sometimes bigger than Easter or Christmas!

They advertise it heavily within the church and the greater community,
 so lots of visitors come for this special worship service—
 even people who never darken the doors of a church otherwise.

What is the ‘Big Give’?

It’s the day that instead of collecting and keeping the offering,
 the church collects it, and then every single penny is given to missions and
 projects

that are helping people in need.

It’s such a popular Sunday that they are thinking about doing it more often.

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2012, pg. 170.

But it's really DEEPER than that.

It's a Sunday that is all about ***seeking the kingdom of God—through generosity.***

The focus of that Sunday is giving,

sacrificial, joyful, and contagious giving.

It has in fact encouraged other churches to do a Big Give,
and it definitely encourages the generosity of everyone who attends that
service—when they tell the stories of lives changed by the gifts.

Cross Timbers Church in Ohio gives away their Easter offering in this way,

and during worship they share stories of changed lives

as a result of the generosity.

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2012, pg. 171.

Where I pastored outside Tulsa, Oklahoma for 17 years,
our local United Methodist church used one of their Advent Sundays
as ***Mission Sunday***—and every penny went to missions that day.

Generosity like that helps advance the kingdom of God.

When the church gives generously, we get a ***clear picture of who Jesus really is,***
Who ***God really is—a GIVER.***

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, in their great book, Contagious Generosity,

Tell these powerful stories.

And they suggest that generosity is ***actually the NEW EVANGELISM.***

I agree.

Generosity IS a form of evangelism—it's great outreach!

It's a witness to the world--

Because generosity is so surprising, and refreshing, and powerful!

We live in a WORLD of greed, and consumerism---

Which seeps into the church as well.

So generosity is a powerful statement of ***hope, joy, and faith.***

It shows the love of Christ in a unique way.

To give sacrificially is truly a LEAP OF FAITH.

And it's something that grows our faith.

Last week I mentioned that generosity is not something we do to raise money.

It's about GROWING DISCIPLES.
growing faith.

***With all the goodness surrounding generosity and giving,
why don't we give MORE?***

Why do we often AVOID generosity,
and only give what is leftover, or what we will not miss?

Usually it boils down to one word: FEAR.

We are afraid.

***Which is probably why Jesus spoke more about money
than any other topic besides the kingdom of God.***

It's why Jesus so often told his followers, DO NOT FEAR.

And here, in the Sermon on the Mount, he says it this way: ***DO NOT WORRY.***

Then he gives reasons that we can trust in God's provision.

Look at the birds and flowers, look how God cares for them....

How much more does God care for us!

How much more does God provide for us!

We are often reluctant to trust God, because of our fear and worry.

So we hoard, save, build bigger barns, and continue to worry.

We can become ***consumed*** by fear and worry, right?

But there is a different way to live as Jesus followers—even in hard economic times,

Especially in hard economic times.

***Lynne Twist, in her book, The Soul of Money,
writes about how in the crash of 2008,***

as they watched their savings and investments disappear,

she and her husband learned a valuable lesson:

They still had their love for one another.

They still had their lives.

They could still count their blessings.

And that's from a woman

who doesn't approach money from a Christian perspective!

How much more are ***WE encouraged to trust in God, when times are tough?***

When we're not sure about our economic future?

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are ***led by the Holy Spirit***,
not the stock market or any economic news.

***The truth is, God has a DIFFERENT message
during tough economic times like 2025.***

Jesus has a message that is very countercultural.

Instead of worry, ***he tells us to TRUST.***

Why?

Because ***God is good and trustworthy—all the time.***

And God provides.

God gives us enough, even enough to share.

Now, of course, God DOESN'T NEED our money.

But God knows that our attitude toward money reflects our obedience
to Jesus as the source of everything.

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2012, pg. 165.

Instead of worrying about money,

Jesus tells us give generously—because GOD'S MATH is different.

Remember what Paul says in ***1 Timothy 6?***

We are called to ***not to be haughty or to set our hopes on the uncertainty of riches***

but rather on God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

***We are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,
storing up for ourselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future,
to take hold of the life that really is life.***

Don't we want the life that REALLY IS LIFE?

True life comes not from taking, hoarding, saving, or focusing on ourselves.

True life comes from GIVING.

From generosity.

From sharing the blessings we've been given.

This is true, no matter what our financial situation!

The truth is, EVERYONE is called to give sacrificially,
 because true generosity is not about an amount, it's about ***growing in faith.***
 it's about our relationship with Jesus.
 We pledge and give and share—because it ***deepens our faith and our love.***
Our hearts grow in ways that they don't otherwise.

In Matthew 5:14 Jesus says to his followers, ***"You are the light of the world"***
 If generosity is the best evangelism,
 then generosity is ***one way that we can be the light of the world.***

***Willard and Sheppard say that generosity is where
 The Great Commandment meets The Great Commission.***

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2012, pg. 169.

The ***Great commandment*** is found in Matthew 14
 and it says that the greatest commandment
***is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength
 and our neighbor as ourselves.***

And the ***Great Commission*** is found in Matthew 28—and it's where Jesus
 commissions his disciples to go to the ends of the earth.
 Jesus says: ***Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
 baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.
 And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age".***

Did you notice that Jesus didn't just give us instructions?

He made a ***promise to be WITH US always, and forever.***

He made a promise that we would know ***HE IS THE ONE empowering*** us to love,
 and serve.

***In Acts 1:8 Jesus says before he ascends to heaven,
 that his followers will receive power to be witnesses.***

And that's exactly what happens in Acts 2
 when the ***Holy Spirit*** fills all the believers and enables them to preach!

***When we think about generosity and giving,
 We cannot forget that GOD IS THE ONE WHO HELPS US TO GIVE!***

So if we are having a hard time giving, God can and will help us!

Willard and Sheppard wisely say about their work with churches:

We work with churches because we believe that following Jesus means learning how to follow him in every area of our lives, including how we handle our money.

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2012, pg. 165.

There's always a danger when talking about stewardship—which includes time, talent AND MONEY.

There's a danger because we might think it's an ***EITHER OR situation***.

That we can give of time and talent, in lieu of giving financial resources.

But Jesus spoke about money more than other topics, even helping and serving,
because he knew that money poses a risk to our hearts.

Money can be like a chain.

And lead us into a state of distrust.

It can cause us to save, store, hoard and seek more and more.

When we talk about stewardship, we need to include talking about money—because money is DIFFERENT.

And we all know it.

We don't go to the grocery store

and worry about being short on time and talent, right?

We worry about MONEY.

Because we need money to live and work and provide for our families!

But we have been entrusted by God with our money,

whatever the amount,

so that we will be ***good stewards, generous, and ready to share.***

And each person's calling and ability to give sacrificially, is UNIQUE.

Only you and God know what that means for you.

Often in the scriptures, a tithe of 10% was given,

Another metric was giving the first fruits of the harvest—

the idea of giving to God first, not what was leftover.

Everyone has something, so everyone can give.

And give gladly, and joyfully, knowing that our giving CHANGES LIVES.

When we give to God, it's not to a budget, or out of obligation.

It's for God—and ***wise churches*** use their money to ***change lives***—through education, worship, study, mission, outreach, or even as we do here, using our building as a ***community space*** for several recovery groups, Spotlight Theater, Arcadian Chorale, Girl Scouts, and more! Generosity changes lives, including our own.

Did you hear Emily Meyers last week,

talking about how she grew in faith because of the Youth group of FPC?

Did you get to talk to any of our ***special guests at our Community Picnic*** in June?

Have you ever stopped ***one of our young people after a Youth Sunday or a Christmas pageant*** to hear their story?

Your gifts change lives!

Another interesting story from the Contagious Generosity book

was about a church that needed a nursery renovation—

because of so many babies.

They were worried about paying for it, despite the fact that they had 18 months worth of savings in the bank.

So they prayed and considered asking the congregation for money.

But that's when they heard God saying, don't keep saving---spend it.

So they spent the money, renovated the nursery, and you know what happened?

Their church exploded with more families,

and all of the families were so excited by the new nursery that the church grew—in numbers, and in faith and joy!

Lives were changed through the generosity of that church.

That is evangelism!

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2012, pg. 174.

Generosity is God's gift to us—

it's the only thing truly helps us resist the

consumption and greed that is so prevalent in our society.

If scarcity, fear and hoarding is a disease....GENEROSITY is the CURE.

And you know what else?

Church becomes irrelevant to people if we do not practice what Jesus preached.

If we hear the message of Jesus about giving,

but do not give, we are deemed ***hypocrites*** by the world, and rightly so.

The early church was known especially for their generosity.

In Acts 4, we read about the generosity of the first church.

They provided not only for their own members,

but also for the needy in the community.

How are we doing with THAT as our model?

We need to use our resources, as individuals, and a church---for ministry!

We need to ***make changes necessary to do ministry,***

and make sure that our giving helps those within the church,

and those outside the church!

This makes me think about the elevator that we will put in next year,

The improved parking lot,

The updates that will enable us to ***host more of our community!***

It makes me think about supporting our ***Food pantry even more,***

And joining in ***serving hot meals*** each month!

This kind of generosity furthers the kingdom of God!

We are called to be generous—with time, talent, and especially money.

Because money is our common experience, and our common ground,

Remember Matthew 6:21?

where your treasure is, there your heart will be also?

It's the opposite of what we expect.

We think: let's get our hearts right, and then we'll give.

But Jesus says GIVE, THEN your heart will follow!

Friends, hear the Good News of the Gospel today:

When we give, we are resisting fear and worry, by seeking the KINGDOM of God. In that kingdom, generosity is ***contagious and life-giving.***

And sharing is hopeful and joyful-----Don't we all need that?

May God guide us into true generosity as we seek the kingdom together.

And for that, all God's people can say, Amen.